NEWS RELEASE
US Army Corps of Engineers, Jacksonville District
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***FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE***

# Army Corps of Engineers begins pulse release from Lake Okeechobee

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. – The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Jacksonville District, will begin a 21-day pulse release from Lake Okeechobee to the Caloosahatchee Estuary at 7 a.m., Mar. 2. An average flow of 800 cubic feet per second (cfs) is the target for the duration of the release.

The last pulse release, which ended Feb. 26, did accomplish the desired effect of contributing to lower salinity levels in the upper estuary. While salinity levels in the estuary have improved, concern is growing over the lake's water level, which has remained relatively unchanged for an extended period of time. Today, the lake level is 13.55 feet NGVD.

"In situations such as these, our water managers, and those of our partners will begin to take actions to achieve a water level recession rate that will protect the lake's ecology and the species that rely on the lake. We must keep the lake healthy. Slowly lowering the water level as seasonal rains approach is the way to promote conditions that are good for fish, wildlife, vegetation and water quality," said Col. Al Pantano, commander of the Corps' Jacksonville District.

The lake level is within the Operational Band of the 2008 Lake Okeechobee Regulation Schedule (2008 LORS). Specifically, the lake is in the Low Sub-band. In accordance with the 2008 LORS, releases may be made up to 3,000 cfs and 1,170 cfs to the Caloosahatchee and St. Lucie, respectively. During this period, the target flows will be much lower than the permissible flows. The target flow to the west, which is measured at the W.P. Franklin Lock and Dam (S-79), will not exceed an average flow of 800 cfs over the 21-day period. The target of no flow to the St. Lucie Estuary through S-80 will remain in

place. The effect of this release on the lake level will be amount to approximately 0.04 feet, or about a half-inch.

"We want this pulse release to begin a trend toward lower lake stages that will provide better conditions for wading birds. Nesting success and survival of hatchlings is heavily dependent on shallow water and other feeding conditions. As always, we will continue to monitor conditions closely, and we may modify releases accordingly. If we see significant rainfall and inflow to the lake, we may increase releases. We will coordinate closely with the South Florida Water Management District, and other agencies and interested parties."

If conditions change that require increasing, decreasing or redistributing flow, public notification will be made via a press release and the Jacksonville District website. Modifications to the lake release will be coordinated with the South Florida Water Management District and other affected agencies, local governments and stakeholders regarding future actions.

A pulse-type release more closely resembles the naturally occurring pattern of runoff into the Caloosahatchee estuary caused by rain, which normally leads to an increase in flow as rain continues to fall, followed by a gradual decrease as runoff comes to an end. Water managers expect these releases to help maintain conditions that are conducive to the sustainability of estuarine organisms. These releases also benefit the overall ecology of the area by promoting the mixing of salinity levels and nutrient concentrations from one water level to another.

For more information on water level data and flows for Lake Okeechobee and the Central and Southern Florida Project, visit the Corps' water management page at http://www.saj.usace.army.mil/Divisions/Engineering/Branches/WaterResources/WaterMgt/index.htm. Questions and inquires may be directed to Nanciann Regalado, 904.334.8954 (mobile).

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